

Die Partei des Krieges zerfällt

PRESSESCHAU SYRIEN #27
10. Januar 2012

Die Muslimbrüder haben offiziell die Beobachtermission der arabischen Liga verurteilt, weil sie finden, dass sie durch ihre Gegenwart dem Bachar el-Assad Regime nur Aufschub gewährten. Diese Darlegung fällt mit der Ansicht der Katar Führer zusammen, die vergeblich versuchten, die Mission abzukürzen, mit dem Argument, falls die Beobachter nicht ihre Informationen bestätigten, würden sie von dem Regime geschickt manipuliert werden.

Ansonsten zitieren die atlantische und die Golfpresse den Berichtsentwurf der Beobachter, indem sie seinen Sinn verdrehen. Die Mission spricht von Fortsetzung der Gewalttaten, was als Bestätigung der fortlaufenden Repression ausgelegt wird, während die Beobachter von der Gewalt der bewaffneten, ins Land eingeschleusten Gruppen sprachen.

Zum Anlass der alljährlichen Rede vor dem vom Heiligen Stuhl anerkannten diplomatischen Korps, hat Papst Benedikt XVI – mit anspielenden Worten - seine Besorgnis über die mögliche Infragestellung der religiösen Freiheit durch die Salafisten und Muslimbrüder in der arabischen Welt ausgedrückt.

Während einer Fernsehpressekonferenz hat der türkische Premierminister Recep Tayyip Erdogan erneuert die syrische Regierung verurteilt. Er hat die seit zwei Wochen sichtbare politische Wende besonders klar gemacht, indem er seiner Sorge über einen möglichen Bürger- oder Religionskrieg bei seinem Nachbarn Ausdruck gab. Nach dem französisch-türkischen Zerwürfnis anlässlich des Massakers der Armenier, das die militärische, anti-syrische Koalition gesprengt hat, fordert Ankara die syrische freie Armee, der er einen hinteren Stützpunkt gewährt, zu mehr Rückhalt auf und appelliert nur an friedliche Herausforderung.

• *L'Orient-Le Jour* meldet die Ankunft des russischen Flugzeugträgers Admiral-Kousnetsow vor Tartus, wo er von General Daoud Rajha, dem syrischen Verteidigungsminister empfangen wurde.

Le Monde (France)

Syrie : la Ligue arabe échoue à muscler sa mission

Critiqués par les opposants au régime de Damas, les observateurs ne recevront pas le renfort d'experts de l'ONU

Comme annoncé vendredi 6 janvier, la Ligue arabe a décidé de maintenir sa mission d'observation en Syrie, malgré les vives critiques dont elle fait l'objet dans les rangs de l'opposition et malgré la poursuite de la répression. Après avoir entendu le premier rapport du chef de ses observateurs, le général soudanais Mohammed Al-Dabi, le comité ministériel de la Ligue en charge du dossier syrien a décidé, dimanche 8 janvier, de « donner aux observateurs le temps nécessaire pour poursuivre leur mission », qui a débuté le 26 décembre 2011.

Dans son communiqué, la Ligue arabe a réclamé à Damas et « à toutes les parties un arrêt immédiat de toute forme de violence », et elle a mis en demeure le régime de « respecter ses engagements ». Mais, contrairement aux demandes pressantes de l'opposition syrienne, l'organisation panarabe n'a pas fait appel à l'envoi d'experts des Nations unies en Syrie, tout en restant ouverte à un appui technique de l'ONU — et de l'Union européenne selon une source diplomatique, notamment en matière de formation de ses observateurs.

Le communiqué appelle au renfort financier, logistique, matériel et en effectifs de la mission, forte de 163 personnes actuellement. Elle souhaite ainsi rapidement porter ses effectifs à 300 observateurs. Un rapport complet doit être remis le 19 janvier, à l'occasion de la prochaine réunion ministérielle de la Ligue arabe. « S'il ressort de ce rapport que les violences n'ont pas cessé, la Ligue arabe aura la responsabilité d'agir », a déclaré le premier ministre du Qatar, le cheikh Hamad ben Jasssem Al-Thani, en pointe sur le dossier syrien avec l'Arabie saoudite et les pays du Golfe, sans préciser quelle mesure était à l'étude.

Il se heurte aux réticences de l'Algérie, l'Irak, du Liban et, dans une moindre mesure, du Soudan, qui ne veulent absolument pas que la mission d'observation de la Ligue arabe serve de prétexte à une internationalisation de la gestion du dossier syrien, notamment par le biais d'un transfert du dossier au conseil de sécurité des Nations unies.

« Pour le moment, tout reste bloqué à l'ONU », note un diplomate occidental en charge du dossier. La Russie a présenté un texte inacceptable, qui met sur le même pied les violences du régime et celles des soldats déserteurs qui protègent les manifestants. Moscou ne veut pas discuter d'amendements et joue la montre, en espérant que la Ligue arabe finisse par constater qu'il y a de la violence de part et d'autre.



Dans un hôpital de Damas, des membres du régime et un observateur de la Ligue arabe (en gilet orange) voient les personnes blessées lors d'un attentat, le 6 janvier. SAHAF/P

Meilleur symbole du soutien de Moscou à Damas, plusieurs navires de guerre russes ont accosté dans la ville portuaire de Tartous ce week-end.

En l'absence de développements à l'ONU, les diplomates occidentaux insistent pour que la mission d'observation de la Ligue arabe ne se transforme pas en une

Trente personnes ont été tuées entre samedi et dimanche. Homs, ville martyre, a payé le plus lourd tribut, avec 19 morts

banale enquête sur les violations des droits de l'homme. « La Syrie s'est engagée sur quatre points en signant le protocole : l'arrêt de la répression, le retrait de l'armée des villes, la libération des prisonniers et le libre accès des médias », insiste le diplomate occidental. La Ligue

arabe est la pour vérifier si ces engagements sont respectés. C'est loin d'être le cas. » Prévue pour durer un mois, la mission de la Ligue arabe est renouvelable un deuxième mois.

Pour Hilal Khasan, responsable du département de sciences politiques à l'Université américaine de Beyrouth, « ce n'est qu'une question de temps avant que la Ligue arabe déclare que les observateurs ne sont pas à même de remplir leur mission. Entravés dans leurs activités, manipulés par le régime, il est difficile qu'ils soient utiles ».

Sur le terrain, la répression des manifestants antirégime s'est en effet poursuivie ce week-end. Selon les Comités de coordination locale (CCL), 30 personnes ont été tuées entre samedi et dimanche. Homs, ville martyre de la rébellion anti-Assad, a payé le plus lourd tribut, avec 19 morts. Dans la région de Deir ez-Zor (est), des maisons ont été brûlées et une dizaine de personnes ont été arrêtées.

Les militants, très actifs dans

l'organisation des manifestations et le relais des informations, ont par ailleurs fait état d'un déploiement massif de la garde présidentielle ainsi que de la 4^e division, commandée par Maher Al-Assad, le frère du président, dimanche à Harasta, dans la banlieue de Damas.

Les médias du régime ont, pour leur part, accordé une large place aux funérailles des victimes de l'attentat survenu vendredi 6 janvier dans le sud de Damas : 26 personnes ont péri lorsqu'un kamikaze s'est fait exploser, non loin d'une mosquée, dans le quartier d'Al-Midane. Les autorités damascènes ont qualifié l'attaque de « terroriste » et annoncé l'ouverture d'une enquête. L'opposition a jugé, des vendredi, que le pouvoir était l'instigateur de l'explosion sanglante.

Pour Ahmad, un militant syrien réfugié au Liban après avoir participé aux manifestations en Syrie durant plusieurs mois, la décision de la Ligue arabe suscite amertume et déception.

Selon lui, l'immobilisme, tant de la Ligue arabe que des pays occidentaux, « a créé une grande méfiance au sein de la population. S'ils ne condamnent pas plus d'urgence le régime, la rue syrienne se détournera d'eux ».

Elle pourrait se tourner de plus en plus vers les soldats déserteurs, dont le nombre ne cesse d'augmenter. De violents affrontements ont d'ailleurs opposé, dans la nuit de samedi à dimanche, des soldats et des déserteurs à Basra Al-Harir, dans le sud du pays, faisant 11 morts dans les rangs de l'armée

régulière, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme, basé à Londres. Par ailleurs, le colonel Afif Mahmoud Souleimane, affecté à une division logistique de l'armée de l'air basée à Hama, a annoncé sa défection sur le site de la chaîne de télévision Al-Jazeera, en compagnie d'une dizaine de ses hommes. Enfin, le général Moustafa Ahmed Al-Cheikh a lui aussi déclaré qu'il quittait son poste : il est le plus haut gradé syrien à ce jour à avoir déserté.

CHRISTOPHE AYAD ET LAURE STEPHAN (À BEYROUTH)



La montée de l'islamisme embarrasse la diplomatie vaticane



décryptage
JEAN-MARIE GUÉNOIS
jmguenois@lefigaro.fr

can pour établir des relations diplomatiques.
Dans le concert international, la diplomatie du Saint-Siège - dirigée par un Français, Mgr Dominique Mamberti - n'est donc pas considérée comme une diplomatie d'opérette.

On s'incline, dans les chancelleries, non devant sa puissance mais devant la qualité de ses informations sur la situation réelle des pays. Elle surprend souvent par son potentiel de contacts dans des zones troublées ou réputées peu ouvertes.

C'est effectivement la seule diplomatie du monde qui parle vraiment toutes les langues et qui ne travaille pas pour les intérêts d'un pays.

Son propos est autre. La défense des droits des catholiques, là où ils sont, dans toutes les cultures et sous tous les

régimes politiques. Et plus largement la défense des droits de la personne humaine, dont la liberté religieuse, comme Benoît XVI l'a fortement rappelé hier.

Un problème délicat

Mais voilà, cette belle machine est placée depuis un an devant un problème délicat : l'émergence du printemps arabe.

Il y a de nombreux catholiques arabes en Afrique du Nord et dans les pays du Proche-Orient. Ce sont des Arabes à part entière. Mais une question nouvelle est posée par l'Islam.

Jusque-là, l'Église catholique s'était confrontée de manières diverses avec cette religion. Allant du drame - comme actuellement au Nigeria ou pas moins de 130 chrétiens ont été sciem-

ment tués depuis Noël - à la bonne intelligence, comme au Liban. Mais rien, jamais, ne se ressemblait.

Cette fois la diplomatie de l'Église catholique - qui en a vu d'autres, notamment à l'époque du communisme - voit fleurir un front de gouvernements

Les urnes ont ouvert à la religion musulmane

ouvertement inspirés par l'islamisme même si, là encore, des variantes existent.

Ce qui l'inquiète, au même titre que les diplomaties occidentales, c'est la dynamique générale : les urnes ont ouvert les portes de la politique à la re-

ligion musulmane. Mais il y a cette fois une forte différence. Cette diplomatie de l'Église n'est plus simplement observatrice mais directement impliquée puisqu'il en va de l'avenir vital de populations chrétiennes.

Ce n'est donc pas un hasard si Benoît XVI a déploré hier ce statut de « spectateurs secondaires de la vie nationale » où sont « relégués » tant de chrétiens quand les lois civiles établissent leurs références fondamentales sur le Coran.

Le défi pour les diplomates du Saint-Siège n'a donc rien de théorique. L'exercice concret la « liberté religieuse » dans la Syrie ou l'Égypte de demain est plein d'incertitudes. Le Pape comme ses diplomates doivent savoir dire les choses dès maintenant, avec netteté, mais sans jamais provoquer. ■

Le Figaro (France)

Le printemps arabe inquiète Benoît XVI

La liberté religieuse est le « premier des droits de l'homme », estime le Pape.

RELIGION La cérémonie est d'une courtoisie exquise mais elle était, hier, empreinte d'une certaine gravité. Elle se déroule dans la salle royale du Vatican. Chaque début d'année les 178 ambassadeurs accrédités près le Saint-Siège présentent leurs vœux au Pape. Il leur répond par un discours de géopolitique, toujours très attendu dans les chancelleries. Le texte est rédigé en français, la langue de la diplomatie du Vatican.

Mais, hier matin, dans cette langue qu'il manie avec un plaisir évident, Benoît XVI n'a pas caché ses inquiétudes pour commenter l'année écoulée et envisager l'avenir. « *Le moment actuel, a-t-il confié, est malheureusement marqué par un profond malaise et les diverses crises, économiques, politiques et sociales, en sont une expression dramatique.* »

« Le mariage gay menace l'humanité »

BENOÎT XVI a estimé hier que le mariage entre homosexuels était l'une des menaces à la famille traditionnelle susceptible d'ébranler « l'avenir même de l'humanité ». Cette condamnation des unions gay a été faite par le Pape lors de la cérémonie traditionnelle des vœux au corps diplomatique accrédité au Saint-Siège. Selon lui, « *L'éducation des enfants a besoin de lieux. Parmi ceux-ci figure en premier lieu la famille, fondée sur le mariage d'un homme avec une femme.* ». « *Il ne s'agit pas d'une simple convention sociale, mais bien de la cellule fondamentale de toute société* », a-t-il ajouté.

Une crise économique et financière sur laquelle il ne s'est pourtant pas étendu. Sinon pour rappeler à l'Occident qu'elle touche encore plus « les pays en voie de développement ». Et que cette « *crise peut et doit être un aiguillon pour réfléchir sur (...) l'importance de sa dimension éthique avant même de le faire sur les mécanismes qui gouvernent la crise économique* ».

Benoît XVI estime certes qu'il faut chercher « à endiguer les pertes individuelles ou celles des économies nationales » mais qu'il faut surtout que la communauté internationale se donne de « *nouvelles règles* ».

La pointe de son propos d'hier était toutefois ailleurs. Sans le nommer explicitement il a commenté comme jamais le printemps arabe. « *Il est difficile actuellement de tracer un bilan définitif des récents événements et d'en comprendre pleinement les conséquences pour les équilibres de la région* », a-t-il analysé, mais « *l'optimisme initial a cédé le pas à la reconnaissance des difficultés* ».

« Droits fondamentaux »

Il a aussitôt placé, comme « *voie adéquate* » pour la reconstruction, la « *reconnaissance* » des « *droits fondamentaux* » de la personne humaine. Ils sont les remparts contre « *toute discrimination injuste, en particulier d'ordre religieux* ». Et Benoît XVI de marteler : « *Le respect de la personne doit être au centre des institutions et des lois et doit conduire à la fin de toute violence (...)* ».

Évoquant alors la Syrie, le Pape a fait part de sa « *grande préoccupation* » et de son souhait de voir « *une rapide fin des effusions de sang et le commencement d'un dialogue fructueux entre les acteurs politiques favorisé par la présence d'observateurs indépendants* ».

Mais la question de la « *liberté religieuse* » est très vite revenue quand il a



Hier, devant le corps diplomatique du Vatican, Benoît XVI a déclaré à propos du printemps arabe : « *L'optimisme initial a cédé le pas à la reconnaissance des difficultés.* » P.P. CITO/AP

rendu hommage au ministre pakistanais Shabbaz Bhatti, « *dont l'infatigable combat pour les droits des minorités s'est achevé par une mort tragique. Il ne s'agit pas, malheureusement, d'un cas unique* », a-t-il constaté.

La liberté religieuse, « *premier des droits de l'homme* », est ainsi « *trop souvent* » « *limité ou bafoué* », a-t-il alors dénoncé. Ainsi « *dans de nombreux pays, les chrétiens sont privés des droits fondamentaux et mis en marge de la vie publique ; dans d'autres, ils souffrent des attaques violentes contre leurs églises et habitations* », évoquant, au passage, le Nigeria. Quand ces chré-

tiens ne sont pas contraints, a-t-il déploré, à « *abandonner des pays qu'ils ont contribué à édifier* » parce qu'ils sont relegués au rôle de « *spectateurs secondaires de la vie nationale* ».

Profitant de ce parterre international, Benoît XVI a alors repris le cri qu'il avait poussé à Assise en octobre dernier : « *Le terrorisme motivé religieusement a fauché l'an passé de nombreuses victimes, surtout en Asie et en Afrique.* » Mais « *telle n'est pas la vraie nature de la religion, c'est au contraire son antithèse* », a-t-il assuré. Ce message, estime-t-il, les responsables religieux « *doivent le répéter avec force et fermeté* ». ■ J.-M. G.

Süddeutsche Zeitung (Allemagne / Germany)

„Solidarität mit Schlächtern“

Anti-amerikanischer Aufruf linker
Politiker empört Parteifreunde

Es ist, so scheint es zunächst, eine Forderung, wie sie viele erheben dieser Tage. „Das iranische und syrische Volk haben das Recht, über die Gestaltung ihrer politischen und gesellschaftlichen Ordnung allein und souverän zu entscheiden“, ist in einem Aufruf zu lesen, den auch sechs Abgeordnete der Linksfraktion im Bundestag unterzeichnet haben. Zu ihnen gehören der Liedermacher Dieter Dehm und die Sprecherin für internationale Beziehungen, Sevim Dagdelen. Der Text freilich ist nicht als Solidaritätsadresse an die Opfer des gewalttätigen Regimes in Syrien oder der Unterdrückung in Iran gedacht. „Die inneren sozialen Konflikte sollen ethnisiert und zugespitzt, ein Bürgerkrieg entfacht werden, um einen Vorwand für die längst geplante militärische Intervention zu schaffen“, heißt es vielmehr.

Für die Gewalt in Syrien benennt der Aufruf klare Schuldige. Das Regime von Baschar al-Assad gehört nicht dazu. Wohl aber die USA und Israel: „Mit ständigen Kriegsdrohungen, dem Aufmarsch militärischer Kräfte an den Grenzen zu Iran und Syrien sowie mit Sabotage- und Terroraktionen von eingeschleusten ‚Spezialeinheiten‘ halten die USA gemeinsam mit weiteren Nato-Staaten und Israel die beiden Länder in einem Ausnahmezustand, der sie zermürben soll.“ Folgerichtig klingt da die Forderung an die Bundesregierung, dass sie „die Embargomaßnahmen gegen Iran und Syrien bedingungslos und sofort aufhebt“.

Der Appell ruft auch innerhalb der Linkspartei Empörung hervor. Gegen „linke Solidarität mit Schlächtern“ etwa wendet sich der Bundesarbeitskreis „Shalom“, der gegen eine israelfeindliche Haltung

der Partei eintritt. „Entgegen der Einschätzung des Appells sind es nicht die Nato, die USA oder Israel, die einen Bürgerkrieg in Syrien anfangen, sondern das syrische und iranische Regime, die auf diese Weise mit aller Brutalität versuchen, einen Keil zwischen die Aufständischen zu treiben.“ Der Arbeitskreis fordert alle Unterzeichner aus der Linkspartei auf, ihre Unterschrift zurückzuziehen. Es sei „schlichtweg zynisch, sich über die erfolgreichen Regimewechsel in Tunesien und Ägypten zu freuen, diesen aber den Menschen in Syrien vorzuenthalten – nur weil das Regime gegen die USA ankämpft.“ Die Linkspartei müsse endlich Schluss machen mit ihrem Antiamerikanismus.

Der Aufruf, den nur Vertreter des radikalen Flügels der Linksfraktion unterschrieben haben, stammt vom Verein „Freundschaft mit Valjevo“. Dieser hatte sich nach eigenen Angaben „unter dem Eindruck des völkerrechtswidrigen Natomkrieges gegen Jugoslawien“ 1999 aus Solidarität mit den Bürgern der serbischen Stadt gegründet. Nun bereiteten die USA und die Nato „offen den Krieg gegen (. .) Syrien und Iran vor“, argumentiert der Verein. Mehr als tausend Bürger hätten den Aufruf schon unterschrieben. *Daniel Brössler*

Kritik an den Reaktionen auf den «arabischen Frühling»

Amnesty International prangert Verhalten von Regierungen an

Nicole Anliker · Die Menschenrechtsorganisation Amnesty International hat in ihrem jüngsten Bericht den Umgang der arabischen Regierungen mit den Rebellionen in ihren Ländern thematisiert. Wenn die Regierungen nicht angemessen auf die Forderungen der Protestbewegungen eingingen, sei im laufenden Jahr mit weiterer Repression und staatlicher Gewalt zu rechnen, prognostiziert die Organisation.

Sorgen mit Syrien

Amnesty blieb der Zugang zu einigen Staaten des Berichtsgebiets verwehrt, zum Beispiel nach Syrien. Die Informationen stützen sich in diesem Fall auf Zeugenaussagen und auf Berichte lokaler Organisationen. Laut Amnesty mangelt es in Tunesien, Ägypten und Libyen bis anhin an den nötigen institutionellen Reformen, welche die Unterbindung von Machtmissbrauch garantieren würden. In Tunesien gibt die Verbesserung der Menschenrechtssituation jedoch Grund, optimistisch zu sein. In Tunesien besteht im laufenden Jahr die Chance, eine neue Verfassung auszuarbeiten, in welcher der Schutz der Menschenrechte und Rechtsgleichheit gewährleistet werden kann.

Obwohl in Libyen verschiedene Menschenrechtsverletzungen begangen worden sind und Straflosigkeit noch immer ein grosses Problem darstellt, hofft Amnesty auf einen Neuanfang. Harsche Kritik wird an der Entwicklung in Ägypten geübt. Der Bericht macht die ägyptische Militärregierung für eine

Reihe von gewalttätigen Vergehen verantwortlich. Zwischen Oktober und Dezember 2011 sollen bei Protesten mindestens 84 Personen getötet worden sein. Im Vorjahr sollen auch weitaus mehr Zivilisten vor ein Militärgericht gestellt und verurteilt worden sein als während der gesamten 30-jährigen Herrschaft Mubaraks. Amnesty befürchtet weitere tätliche Übergriffe des Militärs, um die Proteste einzudämmen.

Grosse Sorge bereitet der Organisation auch die Lage in Syrien, wo die Menschenrechtsverletzungen im letzten Jahr dramatisch zugenommen haben. Systematische Angriffe gegen Zivilisten und sogar Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit werden der Regierung vorgeworfen. Anzeichen für ein Nachlassen der Repressionen sind aus der Sicht von Amnesty derzeit keine auszumachen.

Ungleiche Ellen

Der Bericht klagt auch das Verhalten der Staatenwelt und der regionalen Institutionen an. Diversen Uno-Gremien, der Afrikanischen Union, der Arabischen Liga und der EU werden zögerndes Handeln und inkonsequentes Verhalten vorgeworfen. Der Uno-Sicherheitsrat habe eine militärische Intervention zum Schutz der Zivilisten in Libyen rasch gebilligt. Die Reaktion desselben Gremiums auf die gewalttätigen Niederschlagungen der Proteste in Syrien sei jedoch erst spät und nur sehr halbherzig erfolgt, so beurteilt Amnesty die Lage.

Audiencia al Cuerpo Diplomático

El Papa pide diálogo político en Siria

Su Santidad el Papa mostró ayer su preocupación por la incesante violencia en Siria. En una audiencia concedida a los embajadores acreditados ante la Santa Sede, celebrada en la Sala Regia del Palacio Apostólico, Benedicto XVI expresó su esperanza de que se detenga el derramamiento de sangre en esas tierras de Oriente Próximo y «se inicie un diálogo fructífero entre los actores políticos, favorecido por la presencia de observadores independientes». El Sumo Pontífice comentó también las consecuencias de la crisis económica y social que vive el planeta y apuntó que la educación es «crucial» para superar la situación. En este punto reiteró que las leyes occidentales —«que tantas veces favorecen el aborto, ya sea por motivos de conveniencia o por razones médicas discutibles»— se oponen «a la educación de los jóvenes y al futuro de la Humanidad». Por ello, destacó el papel de la familia —«fundada sobre el matrimonio entre un hombre y una mujer»— en la educación y los ataques que recibe la institución.

El Mundo (Espagne / Spain)



«Dejad de matarnos», reza una pancarta durante una manifestación contra el régimen sirio en Idleb. / REUTERS

La Liga Árabe 'salva' a Asad

El Cairo
«Las violaciones de los derechos humanos en Siria continúan». Ésta es la conclusión del informe preliminar que los observadores de la Liga Árabe presentaron ayer en El Cairo.

La misión del organismo multilateral asegura que las fuerzas armadas de Bashar Asad están desplegadas en la mayoría de

las ciudades, donde siguen los «asesinatos» y «se ven cadáveres». Sin embargo, los observadores de la Liga Árabe no saben a quién responsabilizar por esas muertes, ya que la oposición y el Gobierno se acusan mutuamente y ellos prefieren no tomar partido. De hecho, se limitan a reclamar una mayor libertad de mo-

vimientos y a denunciar el «acoso» que han sufrido tanto por parte del régimen de Asad como por parte de sus rivales. Por ello, el informe aconseja que la misión árabe prosiga con su trabajo.

Así, cuando los muertos por la represión ya se cifran en más de 5.000, los observadores evitan condenar al régimen sirio,

pese a que aseguran haber visto imágenes de opositores abatidos por disparos y constatan que hay detenidos en paradero desconocido.

Ayer, mientras los enfrentamientos violentos causaban al menos una decena de víctimas, los miembros del grupo de contacto para Siria de la Liga Árabe se mostraron divididos sobre la participación o no de la ONU en su misión.

La Vanguardia (Espagne / Spain)

El Papa avisa que la 'primavera árabe' debe respetar los derechos humanos

EUSEBIO VAL

Ciudad del Vaticano. Corresponsal

Benedicto XVI hizo ayer un llamamiento para que los vientos de reforma y liberalización en el mundo árabe desemboquen en un respeto escrupuloso de los derechos fundamentales de la persona, especialmente la libertad de credo, y no se conviertan “en meros instrumentos para conservar o conquistar el poder”.

El Papa, que había estado hasta ahora extremadamente cauto y silencioso sobre la *primavera árabe*, pese a la cercanía geográfica y el impacto en Europa, abordó el tema durante su discurso anual ante el cuerpo diplomático acreditado ante la Santa Sede, en la imponente Sala Regia del Palacio Apostólico Vaticano. Joseph Ratzinger, un pontífice mucho más inclinado al pensamiento teológico y moral que a la acción geopolítica, se había mantenido muy prudente –para algunos, incluso demasiado– sobre lo ocurrido en la otra orilla del Mediterráneo, por temor a ser malinterpretado y a suscitar polémica.

Benedicto XVI no usó el término *primavera* ni las palabras *ára-*

be, musulmán o revuelta. Mesuró mucho el tono, prefirió la neutral referencia geográfica –habló de África del Norte y Oriente Medio– y definió lo que está ocurriendo como “un vasto movimiento de reivindicación de reformas y de participación más activa en la vida política y social”. Constató el Papa que, pese al optimismo inicial, “se abre paso el reconocimiento de las dificultades

Benedicto XVI deplora la violencia en Siria y promueve el envío de observadores

de este momento de transición y cambio”. Y ahí fue donde introdujo, con suavidad pero con firmeza, su consejo. “Me parece evidente que el modo adecuado de continuar el camino emprendido pasa por el reconocimiento de la dignidad inalienable de toda persona humana y de sus derechos fundamentales –afirmó–. El respeto de la persona debe estar en

el centro de las instituciones y de las leyes, debe contribuir a acabar con la violencia y prevenir el riesgo de que la debida atención a las demandas de los ciudadanos y la necesaria solidaridad social se transformen en meros instrumentos para conservar o conquistar el poder”.

El Papa invitó a la comunidad internacional a dialogar con los actores de los procesos en marcha, para construir “sociedades estables y reconciliadas”, y siempre con el objetivo de evitar “toda discriminación injusta, en particular de orden religioso”.

Joseph Ratzinger expresó su “gran preocupación” por los países que viven el proceso con violencia y citó el caso de Siria. No se limitó al obvio deseo de que cese con prontitud el derramamiento de sangre sino que se atrevió a defender “un diálogo fructífero entre los actores políticos, favorecido por la presencia de observadores independientes”.

El Papa no olvidó referirse a la crisis económica, con su impacto en las familias y en los jóvenes “que se han sentido desorientados y frustrados en sus aspiraciones de un futuro sereno”.●

Le Soleil (Canada)

L'opposition syrienne s'en prend à la Ligue arabe

*Agence France-Presse
et Associated Press*

DAMAS — L'opposition a critiqué hier le rapport des observateurs arabes sur leur mission en Syrie, dénonçant «un pas en arrière dans les efforts de la Ligue arabe» après 10 mois d'effusion de sang, une situation «interne» que devrait évoquer le président Bachar Al-Assad, aujourd'hui.

La Turquie, qui réclame le départ du président Bachar Al-Assad, a appelé l'opposition à résister par des «voies pacifiques», après une rencontre avec le plus important groupe d'opposition, le Conseil national syrien (CNS), alors que le premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a mis en garde contre une

«guerre civile et de religions» en Syrie.

Le pape Benoît XVI a plaidé quant à lui pour l'ouverture d'«un dialogue fructueux», «favorisé par la présence d'observateurs indépendants». Le CNS, lui, a appelé au transfert du dossier au Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU et à «la création de zones de sécurité et d'exclusion aérienne» afin de protéger les civils. On compte au moins 5000 morts depuis mars.

Des troupes syriennes ont tiré en direction de manifestants dans la ville agitée de Homs, ont affirmé des militants lundi, au moment où des observateurs de la Ligue arabe visitaient la région pour s'assurer que le régime de Damas respectait sa promesse de mettre fin à la répression.

Monitors 'buying time' for Assad crackdown, activists say

Syrian journalist to 'Post': Arab League has shown no interest in helping anti-gov't protesters

• BY ORIN KESSLER and Reuters
Arab League monitors are only giving Syrian authorities more time to crack down on opponents, opposition figures said Monday after the League opted to keep the mission in place despite Syria's failure to comply fully with an Arab peace plan.

After a meeting in Cairo to review progress, the Arab League said the government had only partly implemented a pledge to stop the repression, free detainees and withdraw troops from cities. It said it would add more monitors to the 165-strong team, ignoring calls to pull the plug on what critics say is a futile effort that provides a fig leaf for Assad to suppress opponents.

"I never expected anything good from the Arab League, so it's not a real disappointment," a US-based Syrian journalist told *The Jerusalem Post*. "Anyone watching the League's actions over the past 10 months knows it's not interested in helping Syria, but only in appearing to be carrying out its responsibilities."
"All Arab countries are dictatorships—who are we kidding?" he said.

"Why would they want a neighboring dictatorship to be toppled? It would spread like wildfire... These dictators are threatened by the Arab Spring. They don't want this to reach their countries."

Rima Flehbas, a member of the Syrian National Council, a leading opposition group in exile, said the initial Arab League report "is too vague, and it essentially buys the regime more time."

"We need to know what the League will do if the regime continues its crackdown in the presence of the monitors. At one point it needs to refer Syria to the UN Security Council," she said.

The observers, whose mission began two weeks ago, have failed to stop a crackdown on protests against President Bashar Assad in which the UN says more than 5,000 people have been killed in 10 months.

The Arab League appears reluctant to defer the matter to the UN Security Council, which in the case of Libya led to foreign military intervention that helped rebels topple Muammar Gaddafi.
Russia and China have opposed

any Security Council move on Syria, while Western powers hostile to Assad have so far shown little appetite for Libya-style intervention in a country that sits in a far more combustible area of the Middle East.

"The costs and risks are too high," Amr Nourizhan, a visiting fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, told the *Post*. "The risks of unintended consequences to neighboring states like Israel, Jordan and Lebanon are critical — the parallel with Libya just doesn't stand."

Nonetheless, Syrian opposition factions are increasingly calling for foreign intervention. On Monday details emerged that a deal between the two main opposition factions had collapsed, apparently signaling that voices calling for intervention to topple Assad have gained the upper hand over those rejecting it.

Ten days ago Barham Ghalioun, head of the mostly exiled Syrian National Council (SNC), signed an accord with the mainly Syrian-based National Coordination Body (NCB) outlining a transition to a democratic post-Assad Syria.

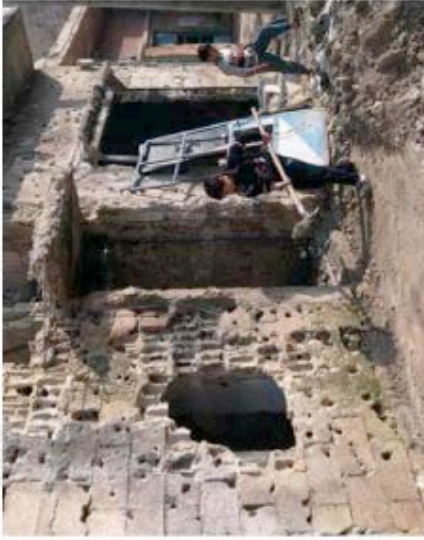
The agreement rejected "any mili-

tary intervention that harms the sovereignty or stability of the country," while leaving the door open for an Arab role to stop Assad's crackdown.

But members of Ghalioun's own council denounced the deal, forcing him to disavow it. Many grassroots protesters inside Syria also rejected it, saying they had lost hope that 10 months of peaceful demonstrations — now accompanied by an armed insurgency in some regions — would bring down Assad.

"The paper has been canceled after pressure from members of the council. Some threatened to resign," SNC member Khaled Kamal said. "Ghalioun signed it without the knowledge of council members, so after consultation he withdrew his signature."

Kamal said many SNC members had originally shared the NCB's rejection of an intervention such as a no-fly zone or buffer zone to protect civilians. "But now all roads are blocked and the political solution did not work," he said.
"After 10 months and after we knocked on all doors... foreign inter-



BOYS REMOVE debris from houses that were damaged by soldiers during protests in Talsien on Sunday. (Reuters)

vention is the only choice before us," he said, adding that the SNC would begin a campaign to get recognition as the only opposition group representing the mass demonstrations. Opposition leaders meeting in Istanbul on Monday reinstalled Ghalioun as head of the SNC.

La Turquie met en garde contre une « guerre civile et de religions » en Syrie

Révolte L'opposition islamiste s'en prend à la Ligue arabe ; au moins 18 morts hier.

Encore une nouvelle mise en garde d'Ankara à Damas. « La situation qui se développe là-bas (en Syrie) conduit à une guerre civile, une guerre nationale, de religions et de communautés. Cela doit cesser », a lancé hier le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan lors d'une conférence de presse télévisée. « La Turquie doit jouer un rôle. Une guerre civile qui surviendrait nous mettrait en difficulté... et ferait peser sur nous une menace », a-t-il ajouté, martelant que « la Syrie a un gouvernement qui assassine ses propres citoyens. Personne ne peut approuver (...) les régimes autoritaires ». M. Erdogan a en outre indiqué que son pays avait commencé à appliquer les sanctions contre Damas et que ces dernières semient renforcées selon l'évolution de la situation.

Appuyant, un porte-parole du ministère turc des Affaires étrangères avait indiqué que le chef de la diplomatie turque, Ahmet Davutoglu, a appelé l'opposition syrienne à continuer sa résistance contre le régime de Damas par des « voies pacifiques », lors d'une rencontre avec une délégation du Conseil national syrien (CNS) comprenant son président, Bourhan Ghaliouan.

Le CNS dénonce « un pas en arrière »

D'autre part, la mission arabe continue de décevoir l'opposition syrienne. « Il est clair que la mission des observateurs (arabes) cherche à couvrir les crimes du régime

syrien », a renchérit le chef de l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH), Rami Abdel Rahmane. A titre d'exemple, selon lui, hier à Homs deux personnes ont été blessées par des tirs d'un barrage militaire « en présence d'observateurs arabes. Cela constitue une violation claire du protocole et rien n'est fait ».

Malgré ces vives critiques la France continue de soutenir la mission arabe. « Il est désormais clair que cette mission doit être significativement renforcée à la fois dans ses effectifs et dans sa capacité à évaluer pleinement et surtout la réalité de l'application des quatre points du plan de la Ligue arabe, sans que le régime ne puisse l'entraver ou masquer la situation », a affirmé le porte-parole du ministère français des Affaires étrangères, Romain Nadal.

Le pape Benoît XVI a, de son côté, demandé hier l'ouverture d'un dialogue fructueux entre les acteurs politiques « de Syrie », favorisé par la présence d'observateurs indépendants ». Benoît XVI a renouvelé aussi son appel de Noël pour une « rapide fin des effusions de sang » en Syrie.

Discours d'Assad aujourd'hui

Malgré ces vives critiques et pressions, rien n'y fait, la répression se poursuit sur le terrain. Al-Arabiya a ainsi rapporté hier qu'au moins 18 civils ont perdu la vie sous les tirs des forces de sécurité. Près de Damas, les funérailles

doit prononcer aujourd'hui avant-midi un discours au cours duquel il évoquera les questions internes en Syrie et les développements de la situation dans la région », a rapporté hier soir l'agence de presse officielle SANA. Le régime, par la voix du quotidien *Ti-Chawat*, s'en est par ailleurs pris au chef de la diplomatie du Qatar Hamad ben Jasssem al-Thani, qui prétend le comité ministériel arabe sur la Syrie, l'accusant d'« inciter à la violence » et de « déployer tous les efforts possibles » pour entraver la mission des

observateurs. Signalons enfin que le ministre syrien de la Défense, le général Daoud Rajiha, a visité un groupe de navires de guerre russes arrivés la veille dans la base navale de Tartous, la seule dont la Russie dispose en mer Méditerranée, a rapporté hier SANA. Dans une allocution, le ministre a rendu hommage à la « position respectable et solide de la Russie au côté de la Syrie, qui fait l'objet d'un complot », a ajouté l'agence. (Sources : agences et rédaction)



Le ministre syrien de la Défense, le général Daoud Rajiha, a visité un groupe de navires de guerre russes arrivés la veille dans la base navale de Tartous. Photo AFP

Syria crisis amplifies black market arms demand

Prices spike as dealers in Lebanon struggle to cope with soaring interest in weapons

By Nicholas Blanford
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: As Abu Rida reels off a list of the latest prices for weapons and ammunition on Lebanon's black market, his small audience lets out low whistles of surprise.

"\$2,000 for an RPG?" said one man, referring to a rocket-propelled grenade launcher.

"I swear to God," replied Abu Rida who has seen his profits skyrocket over the past year. "The prices are crazy. And it's all going to Syria."

Black market arms dealers like Abu Rida are struggling to cope with a soaring demand from Syria that has driven the prices of weapons and ammunition in Lebanon to record highs over the past 10 months. With the uprising against the regime of President Bashar Assad slowly evolving into an armed confrontation, procuring sufficient supplies of weapons and ammunition has become a key requirement of rebel groups, including the Free Syrian Army, a military force composed of deserters from the regular army.

Syrian opposition activists who previously supported a peaceful resistance of street protests now say they accept that weapons are necessary to help tip the balance against the Syrian security forces.

"We don't need people. We have the people. We need weapons and ammunition. If we had that, I can assure you that Assad will be finished very quickly," said Ahmed, a Syrian activist who lives in Beirut in north Lebanon.

The shortage of arms and ammunition in Syria, the high prices in Lebanon and the limited scale of struggling across the borders Syria shares with its five neighbors underlines the hesitancy of external powers to intervene more heavily by offering clandestine military support to the opposition.



The cost of RPGs and other weapons has soared in Lebanon as a result of rising demand from Syria.

gling. The border with Iraq, in particular, stretches across 600 kilometers of mainly stony desert. The Iraqi government of Nouri al-Maliki, the Shiite prime minister, has generally sided with the Assad regime. But the Sunni inhabitants of Iraq's Anbar province in the west adjacent to the Syria border share historic family and tribal ties with the Sunnis of western Syria and sympathize with the Syrian opposition. It is unclear whether arms are being dispatched into Syria from Iraq, but given the remoteness of the border, Iraqi security forces would face great difficulty in blocking such activities should they occur.

Syria has tightened its security measures along its southern border with Jordan with land mines reportedly planted along some stretches of the frontier. Many Jordanians support the uprising against the Assad regime and King Abdullah II has recommended that the Syrian leader should step down. But the amount of arms smuggled into Syria from Jordan is thought to be minimal.

Turkey, the most vocal critic of all Syria's neighbors, hosts some 7,000 Syrian refugees as well as the leadership of the Free Syrian Army. Some weapons reportedly are being smuggled into Syria from Turkey, but the amount appears to be limited and the Turkish government has attempted to block illegal cross border traffic.

"We thought the Turks would help us," said Ahmed, the activist. "There are no weapons being smuggled in from Iraq. I wish there were. We need them."

The main conduit for arms smuggling from Lebanon occurs in north Lebanon. But Syrian troops have laced much of the border here with land mines, set up small military outposts and mount regular foot patrols. The smuggling appears to be ad hoc and on an individual basis by people looking to make a quick profit rather than a more organized transfer of weapons by political groups supporting the Syrian opposition. Last week, the Syrian authorities announced that a consignment of weapons had been seized close to the Lebanese border. The weapons included a light machine gun, rifles, ammunition and 14 RPG launchers.

is priced at \$500, five times the price of a year ago.

"The market is so strong that ordinary people are selling their rifles to make a quick profit," Abu Rida said.

The physical difficulties in smuggling weapons into Syria also help keep prices buoyant. Syria shares borders with Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Israel and Lebanon, all of them — barring the frontier with Israel — relatively porous and traditionally susceptible to smuggling.

began, but arms dealers say there has been a further jump lately in the prices of certain armaments.

"There's a big demand right now for RPG launchers, hand grenades and ammunition," Abu Rida said.

The price of a good quality Russian AK-47 assault rifle has almost doubled in the past 10 months from around \$1,100 to \$2,100. An RPG launcher costs \$2,000 today compared to just \$900 last March and a single grenade

protracted civil war if the opposition shifts more fully from peaceful protests into armed resistance.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu urged Sunday a delegation from the Syrian National Council, the leading opposition body, to maintain "peaceful means" in pursuing its resistance against the Assad regime.

The prices of black market weapons in Lebanon have climbed steadily since mid-March when the uprising

Divisions hinder Syrian opposition movement

By Alastair Beach
Special to The Daily Star

CAIRO: The split between Islamists and secularists that has tainted some of last year's Arab uprisings is souring relations within Syria's opposition, threatening European and American hopes of a united political front against the regime of President Bashar Assad.

Activists say that the Muslim Brotherhood – the Middle East's most popular Islamist organization which has emerged as the strongest political force in post-revolution Egypt – has developed increasing control within Syria's leading opposition movement, the Syrian National Council.

While the Muslim Brotherhood no longer arouses the deep suspicion it once did among Western governments wary of hard-line Islamist movements, there are elements within the opposition who fear any overly religious influence could inflame Syria's delicate tapestry of religious groups.

The SNC recently held talks with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton aimed at solving the ongoing crisis inside Syria, where thousands have died in an unrelenting military crackdown on nearly 10 months of anti-government unrest.

Clinton urged the SNC to reassure

Syria's various sects and minorities that their rights would be respected under any post-Assad government. The Arab League, attempting to implement a Nov. 2 initiative to end the bloodshed has also called for the opposition to unify in order to start dialogue.

Yet many within Syria's political opposition – including members of the SNC itself – believe the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups have too much power over the anti-Assad front.

It is threatening to lead to a showdown with one of Syria's other main opposition groups, the National Coordination Committee – an organization which, unlike the SNC, is comprised of activists still living in Syria.

The NCC has been at loggerheads with its rival for months, accusing the SNC's exile membership of being unrepresentative and saying they secretly support Western military intervention – a position officially rejected by the group but vocally supported by a number of individual members.

Members of the organization say the SNC is driven by a political Islamist agenda which remains lukewarm toward any notion of secularism.

"We have told them frankly that the Islamists have the upper hand in their organization," said a spokesman for the NCC, whose leading members recent-

ly arrived in Cairo to negotiate with the SNC. "We believe the Islamists are a certain political component in Syrian society, but it's not fair that they represent the political majority."

The NCC is using an 18-point constitutional proposal as its blueprint for a secular post-Assad state, calling for "complete equality between its citizens" and outlawing discrimination based on gender or religion.

Divisions came to the fore late December when the SNC executive council rejected a draft agreement with the NCC, signed by the head of the SNC, Burhan Ghalioun, outlining a transition to democratic change and expected to be submitted to the Secretariat of the Arab League when they meet at the end of January.

Ghalioun, a Paris-based academic, was heavily criticized for the move, but meeting in Istanbul Monday, SNC members voted to give him a one-month extension as head of the group.

"Ghalioun's three-month tenure was renewed for another month until a better mechanism to elect a head of the council is devised," a source in direct contact with delegates attending the closed meeting told Reuters in Amman.

For its part, some Syrian activists claim the NCC's stance is cleaving apart the opposition and playing into the hands of Assad.

"We think the NCC should shut up and join the SNC," said Rami Jarrah, a member of an activist group who recently fled Syria. "The fear of [radical] Islam should give them a reason to join. We have these worries as well. But don't just sit there and say 'this is wrong.' It's only wrong because they're allowing it to happen. If they joined the SNC they could influence it."

Adib Shishakli, a leading figure within the SNC, said that the NCC's accusations were unfair, pointing out that the Muslim Brotherhood controlled a maximum of one-fifth of seats on SNC committees. He says the SNC's vision for a post-Assad constitution would enshrine secular values and avoid excessive Islamist influence.

But it is just these types of splits that worry Western governments pushing for change in Syria without the costly military intervention that toppled Moammar Gadhafi in Libya.

British Foreign Secretary William Hague and his liaison with the opposition, Frances Guy, have both stressed that the opposition must unite and organize if it is to have any hope of removing Assad.

According to Syria expert James Denslow, Hague's concerns are well-founded: "A united opposition can only increase the chances of a quicker transition in Syria." – *With Agencies*

Brotherhood blasts monitors

SAYS MISSION IN SYRIA COVERING UP REGIME'S
CRACKDOWN AS TURKEY GALVANISES OPPOSITION

Damascus (AFP) The Arab League yesterday pressed on with its mission to halt 10 months of bloodshed in Syria despite charges it was only serving to cover up the regime's deadly crackdown on protests.

Turkey, which has openly called for Syrian President Bashar Al Assad to step down, meanwhile, called on the opposition to keep up its resistance through "peaceful means."

The opposition Muslim Brotherhood slammed the League after the pan-Arab organisation decided on Sunday to extend its observer mission.

"It is clear that the observer mission in Syria seeks to cover up the crimes of the Syrian regime by giving it the time and opportunity to kill our people and break their will," Brotherhood spokesman Zuhair Salem said.

After a meeting with the opposition Syrian National Council on Sunday in Istanbul, a foreign ministry spokesman in Ankara urged the opposition to carry on with their resistance.

'Peaceful means'

"The Syrian opposition demands democracy and we told them during a meeting yesterday [Sunday] that this should be done through peaceful means," he said, referring to Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu's talks with the SNC.

At a meeting in Cairo the same day, an Arab min-

“It is clear that the observer mission in Syria seeks to cover up the crimes of the Syrian regime by giving it the time and opportunity to kill our people and break their will.”

Zuhair Salem
Brotherhood spokesman

isterial committee gave its widely criticised observer mission to Syria the green light to carry on and pledged to boost the number of monitors.

The committee "decided to give Arab League observers the necessary time to continue their mission according to the protocol," which sets a one-month term, renewable with the agreement of both sides.

The ministers agreed to increase the number of observers and said they may seek "technical assistance from the United Nations" in the face of unrest that the world body said last month has cost more than 5,000 lives.

The committee urged Damascus "to fully and immediately implement its commitments" under the Arab plan, calling on all parties "to immediately stop all forms of violence."

The Syrian Revolution General Commission,

grouping activists on the ground, said the meeting fell "short of expectations." The League should use the "necessary means" to halt the violence or admit failure, it said.

The head of the mission, General Mohammad Ahmad Mustafa Al Dabi, is to give a report to the League on January 19 on Syria's compliance with the peace plan, the ministers said.

Qatari Prime Minister Shaikh Hamad Bin Jasem Al Thani, who chaired the Cairo meeting, called on Syria to "take a historic decision" to stop the bloodshed.

Resolve the crisis

A report by the observers discussed at the meeting showed that "killing has been reduced. But even one killing [is too much]," said Shaikh Hamad, whose country has taken a lead role in efforts to resolve the crisis. Shaikh Hamad said the League hoped to raise the number of observers to 300 "within the next few days" from around 163 now deployed.

The team of Arab League monitors has been in Syria since December 26 to oversee a deal to protect civilians, but the death toll has mounted despite its presence.

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Arab League press on with under-fire Syria mission

DAMASCUS — The Arab League on Monday pressed on with its mission to halt 10 months of bloodshed in Syria despite charges it was only serving to cover up the regime's deadly crackdown on protests.

Turkey, which has openly called for Syrian President Bashar Al Assad to step down, meanwhile, called on the opposition to keep up its resistance through "peaceful means." The opposition Muslim Brotherhood slammed the League after the pan-Arab organisation decided to extend its observer mission.

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hair Salem said. After a meeting with the opposition Syrian National Council on Sunday in Istanbul, a foreign ministry spokesman in Ankara urged the opposition to carry on with their resistance.

"The Syrian opposition demands democracy and we told them during a meeting yesterday (Sunday) that this should be done through peaceful means," he told AFP, referring to Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu's talks with the SNC. At a meeting in Cairo the same day, an Arab ministerial committee gave its widely criticised observer mission to Syria the green light to carry on and pledged to boost the number of monitors. The committee "decided to give Arab League observers the neces-

sary time to continue their mission according to the protocol," which sets a one-month term, renewable with the agreement of both sides.

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The committee urged Damascus "to fully and immediately implement its commitments" under the Arab plan, calling on all parties "to immediately stop all forms of violence." The Syrian Revolution General Commission, grouping activists on the ground, said the meeting fell "short of expectations." — AFP

Defectors from Syria's army make plea for aid

Living in poverty in Lebanese hideout

Free Syrian Army troops have limited weapons and supplies, and along with the opposition, have called for the swift creation of a safe zone

Alice Fordham

AKKAR, LEBANON // Under cover of darkness, in a shabby rented house in the northern Lebanese mountains, a dozen Syrian men huddled around a wood stove, candlelight flickering on their drawn faces.

All identified themselves as defected soldiers who were forced to conduct operations against a widespread protest movement before they fled the army.

They said they escaped over the border into the relative safety of Lebanon, where they joined the Free Syrian Army.

This loose collection of defectors and armed civilians claims thousands of members and posts footage of attacks on military infrastructure on Facebook.

But the men in north Lebanon, all of them Sunnis, said they live in poverty and secrecy, number a few hundred at most and have limited access to weapons – raising questions about the organisation's ability to have a substantial impact on well-armed and organised Alawite Syrian security forces.

"The arms we have are what we de-

fected with, or things that we steal from the other side," said a man who added that he had been a private in the army.

The men said they receive no international help and have been visited by no military attaches, although they would take arms, money or supplies from almost anyone who offers them.

The defectors have won grudging support from the Syrian National Council, the most prominent political group calling for the removal of the president, Bashar Al Assad.

In a statement last month, the council recognised the Free Syrian Army's "honourable role in protecting the peaceful revolution of our people".

They have garnered enthusiastic approval from other Syrian dissidents, who carry banners with the group's name at demonstrations and chant for them to protect civilians from security forces, in the hope that the Free Syrian Army could one day present a challenge to the military.

sectarian divisions dominate the Syria's armed forces, they said. Because they are Sunnis, they said, their work had been watched close-



Free Syrian Army troops in the valley near the village of Ain Al Issids, in the Idlib province of Syria, close to the Turkish border last month. Other members of the group are hiding out in the northern Lebanese mountains but say they have few weapons or supplies. (5/23/12) Ehab / AFP

ly by soldiers and informal militias, known as shabiha, from the Alawite sect of the president's family.

It was the Alawites who ensured that soldiers followed orders, the defectors said, which included firing live bullets at protesters.

Their accounts matched those in a recent report by Human Rights Watch, which includes more than 60 interviews with defectors. The report provides detailed evidence of high level orders to fire on unarmed civilian protesters, said the group's Middle East director, Sarah Leah Whitson. Unlike the

uprising in Libya that swept Muammar Qaddafi from power, she added, in which large numbers of troops defected en masse and fled to the opposition stronghold of Benghazi, Syria has no such haven for defectors.

The Free Syrian Army and members of the Syrian opposition have called for the swift creation of a safe zone, patrolled by an international military force, along Syria's northern border with Turkey.

The men in Lebanon said that if Syrian army soldiers had somewhere to go, many would defect.

Although they are relatively safe in Lebanon, the defectors there fear being caught and deported by Lebanese security forces.

But massive defections remain a distant prospect, said Henri Barkey, a professor of international relations at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania.

He said Turkish authorities think that Mr Al Assad will fall but are unwilling to intervene directly.

Meanwhile, the defectors in north Lebanon continue their missions. As some spoke anonymously, others excused themselves, saying they

were heading across the border later that night. At least two had been killed in minefields in the past week, they said, offering names and military identification numbers as proof.

"When we have funerals for the martyrs, we don't grieve, but we congratulate each other on the honour," said one of the defectors. "This is what makes the soldiers so determined."

★ The Washington Post

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GLIMMER OF HOPE FOR SYRIA BEFORE ARAB LEAGUE'S EXIT

I was a short distance away from the explosion that ripped through a busy intersection in the Syrian capital on Friday, hitting a police bus and killing at least 26 people. I was busy watching a small pro-government demonstration in the courtyard of the historic Omayyad Mosque after Friday prayers, a frequent occurrence organized by regime loyalists to show the Bashar al-Assad still has the backing of the people. Amid the anti-US and anti-Israeli rhetoric of the milly, young people were chanting slogans like "Turkey and Syria in unity," hoping to strike a tone with Turks watching the crowd.

The bombing was a stark reminder that life is far from normal in the Syrian capital, where the opposition has long been at odds with the authoritarian Bashar al-Assad regime. Accusations were traded between the government and opposition over who instigated the deadly attack. The government blamed insurgents, while the opposition claimed that the notorious Syrian intelligence services had organized the attack in order to suppress the miles and influence the upcoming initial report by Arab League monitors, scheduled to be discussed two days later in Cairo.

I am not sure the presence of Arab League monitors is helping to improve the situation. Through sheer luck I was staying at the same hotel, the Cham Palace in downtown Damascus, as the head of the Arab League observer mission, Lt. Gen. Mohammed Ahmed Mustafa al-Dubi of Sudan. We often bumped into each other in the lobby and he was visibly nervous, chain smoking during morning meetings with his aides. He said he has not yet made up his mind over the events taking place in Syria. Al-Dubi is in the hot seat: Facing a barrage of criticism from Arab officials as well as the Western audience, his credibility and integrity has been openly questioned.

To his credit, I must point out that he has at least secured the freedom of hundreds of political prisoners as well as convincing the government to remove heavy armor from the cities and show restraint in the use of deadly force. It is difficult to predict what will happen a month from now, when the monitors leave Syria.

Following a government-organized visit to the restive city of Homs in the north west, it became clear that Syrian government officials are in total denial of what has been taking place in their country. They hoped to convince us, including reporters from Turkey, Germany, Japan, Algeria and Austria, that all the killings were perpetrated by insurgents and that the army had intervened solely to protect the residents of the city. We were expected to be naïve and take their word for it without question. The governor of Homs, Ghassan Abdul-AI, was typically evasive in his responses and appeared to be disconnected from reality. He could not even confirm the number of investigations launched into extra-judicial killings committed by security forces.

There has been a definite breakdown of dialogue between the opposition and the government in Syria, reinforced by a lack of trust and huge differences over in which direction the country should be heading. The Alewite-controlled regime has consolidated the ranks of the Alewite minority, fueling fears of possible Sunni reprisal if or when the regime falls. It may even be possible that some of the brutal attacks on Alewite districts might have been orchestrated by the Syrian intelligence forces in order to shore up support for the regime among Alewites. The crystallization of differences between Alewite and Sunni neighborhoods is already under way and the two communities are reportedly arming themselves for the day of reckoning.

Assad's regime realizes that it is playing a game of

survival and understands that it has little chance of winning this as the region and the world continue to ostracize them. The only card it has left to play is to convince other countries that all hell will break loose if the regime collapses. It has even armed the Kurdish minority in the north, hoping that Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militants will consolidate their power base in Syria and therefore act as a buffer zone against possible Turkish intervention.

Turkey's shift in attitude, from close friend to open critic of the regime, has had a shocking impact here. In the last nine years, Turkey has been a gateway out of international isolation for the Syrian people. Millions of Syrians were visiting Turkey, having their weddings in Turkish cities, conducting trade and getting education there. This link has now been completely cut off. The Syrian regime is busy trying to portray Turkey as acting in line with Western and Israeli interests, although they are sufficiently careful not to accuse Turkey directly.

There is a reason for that, of course. For one, Turkey has not used all of its power to isolate Syria, fearing that rapid destabilization would do a great disservice to the region. The slapping of nine-point, smart sanctions on Syria by Turkey in November is mostly symbolic, as they only target the upper echelons of the Syrian regime. The visa-free travel and code-sharing agreements between Turkish airlines and their Syrian counterparts are still in place. Turkey did not even initiate the suspension of the free trade agreement with Syria. It was the Syrian regime itself that decided to shelve the agreement, shooting themselves in the foot as the price of commodities has inevitably surged in Syria. It was a stupid move on the part of the Syrian government.

In my opinion, Turkey may have rushed decisions made regarding Syria. This is possibly as a result of guilt over Libya, when Turkey only took up a position against Gaddafi at a relatively late stage. However, in our haste we have lost an important window of opportunity to intervene in Syria to calm the situation down. Turkey could very well be a perfect mediator between the desperate Syrian regime and the opposition, relying on the respect that Turkey has built up with both sides over time. When Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan threw the towel in and abandoned Assad, we lost that valuable leverage.

Now, the main question is what other options remain available to Turkey with respect to Syria. From talk I've heard here from the president, vice president, foreign minister and senior religious figures I sense there is still considerable appetite for restoring ties with Turkey. Assad believes this hiccup between the two countries is temporary. This might represent a final and very narrow window of opportunity that could avoid civil war or outside intervention in Syria. To capitalize on this opportunity, we have to review what steps the Assad regime is willing to take in order for the Turkish government to sell this as a major step forward to Turkish voters, to Syria's opposition and to the belligerent West. Tangible and swift change in Syria may provide enough room to maneuver for Turkish diplomacy, and we may be able to get dialogue back on track.

Unfortunately, we do not have much time to make the most of this narrow opportunity. The Islamist-based Turkish Felicity Party's (SP) leader Mustafa Kamalak's last ditch effort in Damascus last week may well have served a vital purpose, buying us precious time. However, as more blood is spilled, the opposition and the regime will become more firmly entrenched, moving away from the reconciliation at lightning speed. In the end, both sides will lock themselves in a tight corner, and in all likelihood an all-out civil war is inevitable.

Today's Zaman (Turquie / Turkey)

LOGIC AND FALLACIES IN SYRIAN THINKING EXPOSE FAILED PROPAGANDA

NEWS ANALYSIS

Abdullah Bozkurt

TODAY'S ZAMAN

From a first person account on the ground in Damascus and Homs last week and following a series of talks I had with senior Syrian officials, I realized there are a number of fallacies in the Syrian defense arguments with regard to Turkey. Likewise, there are strong counterarguments that can easily be raised against talking points often cited by Bashar al-Assad loyalists.

The first argument we heard was that Syria allowed Turkey to maintain its positive trade balance because President Assad believed good relations with the large neighbor in the north were so important that Syria had to tolerate the negative trade balance. Syrians supposedly accepted the influx of high-quality Turkish goods despite an outcry from local merchants.

It is true that Turkey has sold more to Syria than it bought from the country over the last decade. But this is quite natural considering the poor state of the Syrian manufacturing base. However, trade has actually enhanced the competitiveness of the Syrian economy by bringing in expertise, know-how and technology. It, in short, enhanced the Syrian economy. What is more, Syria received a substantial amount of Turkish investment to compensate for the negative trade balance. Turkey became a gateway for Syrian products to reach international markets. The number of Turkish visitors to Syria increased dramatically, meaning extra revenue for the Syrian treasury.

The second argument was that Syria did not support armed groups in their campaigns against Turkey, especially the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) decades-long dirty war against Turkey, whereas Turkey supports armed groups against the Syrian regime and even trains them. Well, there is simply no evidence that Turkey supports armed factions in their battle against the Syrian regime. It is, however, possible that some arms smugglers may have used the

Israeli officials also unsuccessfully tried the pull the same trick. It simply did not work.

The fourth argument centered on punitive measures and trade barriers. Syria believes slapping extra fees and duty on Turkish products would hurt Turkey and create a backlash among Syrians against Turkey because of increased prices of imported goods. This simply defies the rules of economics. First of all, the Syrian government would take the fall for soaring prices and inflation, not a foreign government. Any rise in the price level of Turkish commodities and manufactured goods would hurt Syrian consumers, who, for the past decade, have become accustomed to high-quality Turkish products. Secondly, the trade volume with Syria represents less than 1 percent of Turkey's trade, and it would not make a dent in the booming Turkish economy. Turkish companies continue to make engage in trade with the Gulf, using alternative routes bypassing Syria, costing hundreds of millions of dollars in transit fees to the Syrian economy.

The fifth talking point floated by Syrian officials was that the Syrian regime is not in the business of killing civilians but rather deploying the army to defend its citizens against what they call "terror attacks" instigated by foreign powers. We know that Turkish intelligence has collected an impressive amount of data both through human assets on the ground in Syria and from interviews conducted with refugees and defectors. The intelligence confirms the systemic killing and abductions of civilians suspected to be regime opponents by Syrian security forces. The fate of some of these people is still unknown. There are horrible, hair-raising stories. Turkey has not made public its findings out of fear that it will create a huge uproar in Turkish public opinion, prompting a call for intervention.

The last argument focused on the reform process. Syrian officials say Turkey should have supported the reform process in Syria. They claim it is not easy to make changes especially amid regional developments that make it difficult to proceed on the reform path. Syrian officials cite the Iraqi occupation, the Hariri assassination and the Israeli Gaza offensive as the major events that have hampered the progress on the reform.

That simply is not true. In the last decade, Turkey has helped the Syrian government to enhance its government management capacity and advised on a number of democratic changes to be implemented over time. However, the so-called "Arab Spring" created a sense of urgency for Syria to undertake comprehensive reforms at once in order to stem the coming wave. Syria had even agreed to implement the Turkish proposal of reforms mapped out and dated in detail. It later backed away from that promise. Turkey had to wait for seven months since the March uprisings began in order to conclude that the regime was not sincere enough to implement the promised reforms. Assad's pledge of reform was never realized. It was too little, too late. In the meantime, killings of civilians continued unhindered according to the UN. That made Syria bear the wrath of Turkey when patience ran out and Turkey had to come out forcefully against the Assad regime.

Syrian officials need to find better talking points to convince skeptics, or their arguments will be deemed mere "propaganda." When we were taken on a government tour to the restive city of Homs, we, as journalists, were fed with the official version of what has been going on in Syria in the last 10 months. One Japanese reporter summed up the whole theatrical scenario, saying, "We are in Alice's Wonderland."

SYRIAN OPPOSITION DECRIES ARAB LEAGUE, URGES UN INVOLVEMENT

Critics within Syria's opposition also say that expanding the mission strictly under the umbrella of the League may doom the mission to failure. 'The mission must be dramatically expanded and include better trained observers'



Syrian protesters chant anti-government slogans outside a hotel in Cairo, where an Arab League meeting was being held to discuss the report of a peace mission in Syria.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1
The Arab League on Sunday warned the Syrian government that it had only partly complied with a League-backed deal that calls for an end to most government violence, the release of political dissidents jailed during the crisis and withdrawal of armoured vehicles and soldiers from cities.

Nevertheless, the group announced its hopes on Sunday that the mission can yet succeed and promised that the current 185-person monitor mission will be bolstered by additional personnel, training and resources. Pro-democracy campaigners meanwhile criticise the mission as "toothless" and accuse the league of playing into the hands of al-Assad's plans to buy time and suppress opponents.

Critics within Syria's opposition also say that expanding the mission strictly under the umbrella of the League may doom the mission to failure.

"The mission must be dramatically expanded and include better trained observers. There were more than 2,000 observers in [the 1998 peacekeeping mission in] Kosovo, and now in Syria we have just over 180 -- this in a country that is 10 times larger than Kosovo," SNC spokeswoman Basma Khadrat told Today's Zaman on Monday. Videos taken by activists and released by Reuters on Monday showed Arab League observers frantically demanding that Syrian officials remove photojournalists from the streets of Hama. As gunfire erupted in the background, street protesters told the camera that the government was hiding tanks and armoured vehicles in nearby buildings.

The inability of the observers to halt the violence has also led to claims that the observer mission should be ended outright. Early last week the Arab Parliament, a pro-Arab advisory group, called on the Arab League to immediately withdraw all monitors from Syria in protest of continued killings.

Arab Parliament head Ali Salem al-Dabbas told Agence France Presse (AFP) on



Naval personnel stand in front of the Russian aircraft carrier Kuznetsov in the Syrian city of Tartus.

Jan. 2 that the mission had "missed its aim of stopping the killing of children," and further stated that it gave "the Syrian regime a cover to commit inhumane acts under the noses of the Arab League observers." Arab League officials in response insisted that the presence of observers has persuaded the regime to take its tanks off the streets and halt its most blatant acts of violence.

Turkey calls for peaceful resistance as violence spreads. Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu meanwhile urged the Syrian opposition to use "peaceful means" in the face of the regime's continued crackdown during a conference on Sunday.

"The Syrian opposition must use peaceful means in its quest for democracy," a foreign ministry spokesperson told Today's Zaman on Monday. The meeting between Davutoglu and a 10-member delegation led by SNC leader Burhan Ghalioun was designed to "strengthen ties" between the opposition group and the Turkish government, the spokesperson stated. The

meeting is the third known meeting between the foreign ministry and the council, which formed in Istanbul in September of last year.

Fears that anti-regime violence may overshadow the country's widely-peaceful protest movement has grown in recent months, with Syrian state news agency SANA reporting on Monday that the government would provide an "immediate" response to last week's suicide bombing in the capital Damascus, an attack that left 26 dead. Both the government and opposition groups have accused each other of orchestrating the attack and another Damascus bombing that killed 44 people on Dec. 23.

UN chief Ban Ki-moon condemned the bombings last week. In December the world body estimated more than 5,000 people had been killed in the conflict since it began in March.

Last weekend also saw the arrival of a large Russian naval flotilla led by an aircraft carrier to the Syrian port of Tartus, a development Russia said was hailed by state media as a show of solidarity by its Cold War ally. *Gabe Reiter*

Moscow Times (Russie / Russia)

Russia Touts Arab Observers

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REUTERS

Russia said Tuesday that Arab League monitors are playing a stabilizing role in Syria, disagreeing with Syrian opposition figures who say the mission has only given President Bashar Assad more time to crush opponents.

Moscow welcomed an Arab League decision to continue the two-week-old mission to monitor implementation of the government's pledge to stop a crackdown the United Nations says has killed more than 5,000 people in 10 months of protests.

"Their deployment is already exerting a stabilizing influence on the situation and helping to provide a truthful and objective picture of what is happening," a Russian Foreign Ministry online statement said of the observers.

Separately, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov urged Arab League observers to focus their efforts on the actions of both Syrian authorities and protesters during their mission.

After a review meeting on Sunday, the Arab League said Damascus had only partly carried out a pledge to stop the bloodshed, free detainees and withdraw troops from cities that have been hotbeds of unrest. It said the number of observers would grow to 200 this week from 165.

Opposition figures said Monday that the presence of the mission was counterproductive, giving Damascus more time to suppress its adversaries violently. There has been no apparent reduction in the bloodshed since monitors arrived on Dec. 26.

In his first public speech for more than six months, Assad on Tuesday blamed "foreign planning" for the uprising and vowed to strike "terrorists with an iron fist."

Arab League presses on with Syria mission

DAMASCUS, Syria — The Arab League on Monday pressed on with its mission to halt 10 months of bloodshed in Syria despite charges it was only serving to cover up the regime's deadly crackdown on protests.

Turkey, which has openly called for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to step down, meanwhile, called on the opposition to keep up its resistance through "peaceful means".

The opposition Muslim Brotherhood slammed the league by saying the observer mission in Syria seeks to "cover up the crimes of the Syrian regime by giving it the time and opportunity to kill our people and break their will", according to its spokesman Zuhair Salem.

At a meeting in Cairo on Sunday, an Arab ministerial committee gave its widely criticized observer mission to Syria the green light to carry on and pledged to boost the number of monitors.

The committee "decided to give Arab League observers the necessary time to continue their mission according to the protocol" which sets a one-month term, renewable with the agreement of both sides.

The ministers agreed to increase the number of observers and said they may seek "technical assistance from the United Nations" in the face of unrest that the world body said last month has cost more than 5,000 lives.

The head of the mission, General Mohammed Ahmed Mustafa al-Dabi, is to give a report to the League on January 19 on Syria's compliance with the peace plan, the ministers said.



A Syrian woman (left) speaks with an Arab League observer attending a mass prayer for people killed in the violence around the country, at the Holy Cross Church, in Damascus, Syria, on Monday.

MUZAFFAR SALMAN / ASSOCIATED PRESS

25
people
killed and 46 others were injured Jan 6

A report by the observers discussed at the meeting showed that "killing has been reduced. But even one killing (is too much)", said Sheikh Hamad, whose country has taken a lead role in efforts to resolve the crisis.

Sheikh Hamad said the league hoped to raise the number of observers to 300 "within the next few days" from around 163 now deployed.

A Syrian television channel close to the regime, Durnia, said on Monday that a convoy of Arab monitors had come under fire from a "terrorist group" in the Baba Amro district of

44
people
killed and 166 others injured Dec 23, 2011

Homs, a flashpoint city in central Syria, wounding a driver.

Stepping up its attacks on Doha, the daily Tishrin, the official press in Damascus on Monday accused the Qatari premier of "inciting violence" and working to sabotage the Arab mission.

Sunday's meeting came amid further violence in Syria, in which at least 13 civilians were killed by security forces and 11 soldiers died in clashes with deserters, human rights activists said.

Observers limited
Mostapha Abdullah, a com-

300
children
died in the nine-month uprising in Syria, the UN said

mentator on Syrian issues, said the league needs to improve the mission's operating mechanism. If the pan-Arab group can't coerce the Syrian government to perform all of the items in the protocol that Damascus signed in December, its months-long mediation effort will be doomed to fail, he said.

A research fellow with the Egyptian State Middle East Research Center, who only gave his name as Hossam, believed that the role of the Arab League observers mission in Syria is limited.

AFP—XINHUA

TIME LINE

• **Jan 6**
25 people were killed and 46 injured when a suicide car bombing occurred in al-Midan neighborhood in central Damascus on Friday.

• **Dec 23, 2011**
Two suicide bombings targeting two intelligence centers rocked Damascus, leaving 44 people killed and 166 others injured, 8 days after the first batch of Arab League monitors arrived in Damascus to assess whether the country abided by an Arab peace plan to end the crackdown on protesters.

• **Dec 22, 2011**
An advance team of Arab League observers entered Syria, as part of an agreement that Assad's government made with the Arab League to try to end months of unrest and calling for halt of violence.

• **Nov 20, 2011**
Assad told the Sunday Times newspaper Syria will not bow down as the conflict in Syria as well as the pressure to subjugate the country are set to continue, and he warned that any western intervention in Syria would pose a threat to peace across the Middle East.

• **Nov 18, 2011**
Syria accepted the Arab League's plan to allow 500 observers into the country to verify whether the regime has taken measures to protect civilians.

• **Nov 12, 2011**
The Arab League unanimously decided to suspend Syria's membership for failing to implement a peace plan inked by the Assad government and the pan-Arab body to end a deadly crackdown on protesters.

► Turkey tells rebels to keep pushing for democracy

Arab League presses on with Syria mission

The Arab League yesterday pressed on with its mission to halt 10 months of bloodshed in Syria despite charges it was only helping to cover up the regime's deadly crackdown on protests.

Turkey, which has openly called for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to step down, meanwhile, called on the opposition to keep up its resistance through "peaceful means."

The opposition Muslim Brotherhood slammed the League after the pan-Arab organization decided on Sunday to extend its observer mission.

"It is clear that the observer mission in Syria seeks to cover up the crimes of the Syrian regime by giving it the time

and opportunity to kill our people and break their will," Brotherhood spokesman Zahair Salem said.

After a meeting with the opposition Syrian National Council (SNC) on Sunday in Istanbul, a foreign ministry spokesman in Ankara urged the opposition to carry on with their resistance.

"The Syrian opposition demands democracy and we told them during a meeting yesterday (Sunday) that this should be done through peaceful means," he told AFP, referring to Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu's talks with the SNC.

At a meeting in Cairo the same day, an Arab ministerial committee gave

its widely criticized observer mission to Syria the green light to carry on and pledged to boost the number of monitors.

The committee "decided to give Arab League observers the necessary time to continue their mission according to the protocol," setting a one-month term, renewable with the agreement of both sides.

The ministers agreed to increase the number of observers and said they may seek "technical assistance from the United Nations" in the face of unrest that the world body said last month had cost more than 5,000 lives.

The committee urged Damascus "to

fully and immediately implement its commitments" under the Arab plan, calling on all parties "to immediately stop all forms of violence."

The Syrian Revolution General Commission, grouping activists on the ground, said the meeting fell "short of expectations." The League should use the "necessary means" to halt the violence or admit failure, it said.

The head of the mission, General Mohammed Ahmed Mustafá al-Dabi, is to give a report to the League on January 19 on Syria's compliance with the peace plan, the ministers said.

AFP